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ABSTRACT

This booklet is designed to offer new parents clear, common-sense advice on how to nurture infants and preschoolers. It advises parents to set the stage for what their children learn in school and beyond. Six sections focus on specific activities that contribute to early childhood development and well-being in the first 6 months, from 6 to 12 months, and between the ages of 1 and 2, 2 and 3, 3 and 4, and 4 and 5 years. Each section provides five or six basic activities, and three to five additional activities, that parents can perform with their children. Each section also contains a reminder for parents, for example, urging them to be patient with newborns or be consistent and thoughtful in disciplining toddlers. The booklet concludes with a section on how parents can ease their child's transition from home to school. Children entering school should: (1) be able to distinguish the size, color, and shape of objects; (2) understand the concepts of position, direction, time, and order; (3) possess talking, listening, and observing skills that will help them learn to read and write; (4) understand numbers and volume; (5) be at an appropriate level of physical development; and (6) possess appropriate social and emotional skills. (MDM)

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The First Five Years

Little Beginnings

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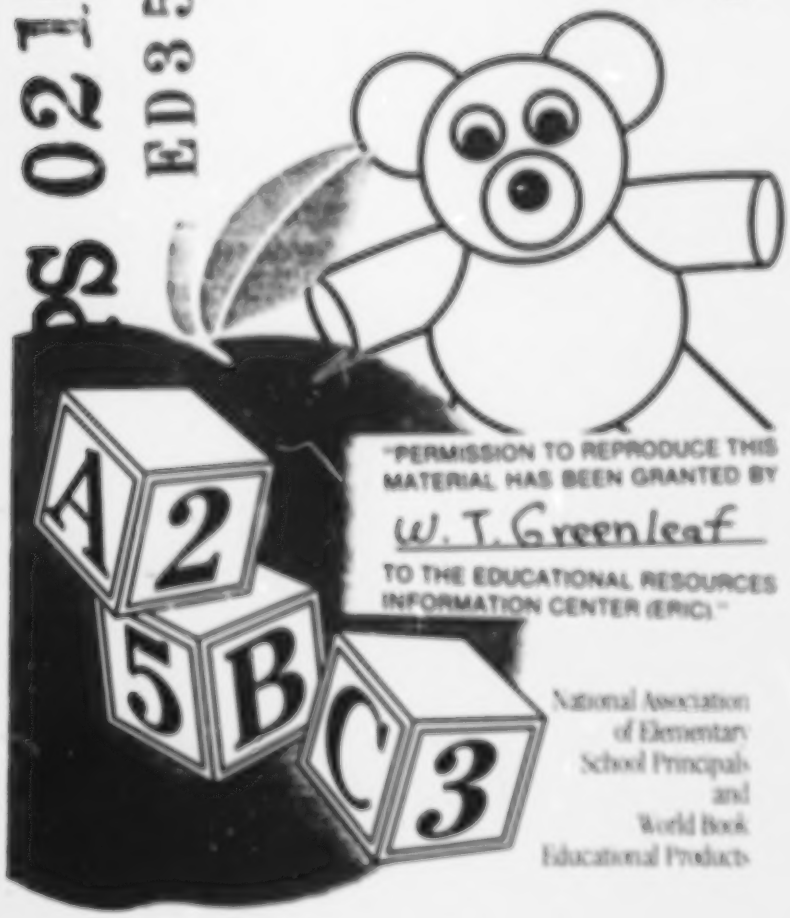
Starting your child on a lifetime of learning



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Dear Parents:

Raising children was the most exciting adventure of my life — and the most important. But it was not always the easiest, and I welcomed all the advice I could get.

All parents have dreams for their children. As you're caring for your new baby and active preschooler, remember that RIGHT NOW is the time to begin making those dreams come true.

This brochure is different from the usual information new parents get on feeding and sleeping schedules, immunizations, how children grow, teething, and childhood illnesses. *Little Beginnings* answers parents' questions about something your child is doing all the time — LEARNING. Your child does a huge amount of learning during the first few years, before school ever begins, and you can make sure it's the best possible kind.

In this brochure you'll find lots of ways to help your children discover the joys of learning, and many suggestions for helping them grow up feeling confident and secure — an essential part of learning. You'll learn how important it is to let your actions convey respect and love, not anger or fear. And closest to my heart, you'll find out how to make reading a part of your children's daily lives, even before they can understand a single word.

I am very grateful to our elementary school principals and their partners in business and government who worked together to gather this invaluable information for families. We all care about your children. They are our future. Thank you for doing everything you can to give them a great start.

Warmly,

Barbara Bush

Barbara Bush

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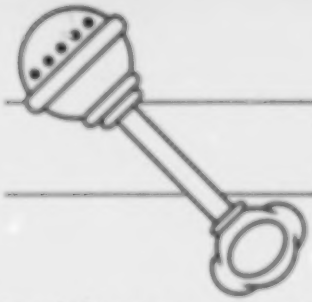


THE FIRST SIX MONTHS

Your baby may seem to require only milk, sleep, and diapers; but, to grow, he needs more. To learn to talk, he needs to be talked to. To learn about love and security, he needs to be cuddled and cared for gently. To learn about the world, he needs to see, hear, smell, and touch. Your baby never needs punishment.

ANYTIME IDEAS

- Love helps your baby feel secure. Give her lots of hugs and smiles. Say "I love you," and show that you mean it.
- Your baby loves to hear your voice, so talk to him! Use his name and look into his eyes. Watch his face light up.
- Ask your baby questions, even though you know you won't get a "real" answer. "Would you like to go for a walk now?" "Do you need a clean diaper?"
- Give your newborn interesting things to look at and reach for. Include a variety of sizes, shapes, and colors. Make sure everything is clean and baby-safe — unbreakable, with no sharp or pointed edges to cut, small pieces or parts to choke on, or long cords to get tangled in.
- Get your little one out of the crib when sleeping time is over so that you can enjoy each other's company, and so she can watch and listen and learn.
- Read aloud to your baby. Tell him stories or nursery rhymes. Or read to him from your favorite magazine.

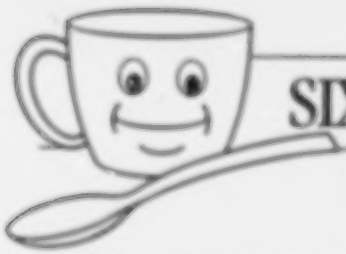
LITTLE EXTRAS

Sing a song to your baby, or turn on some interesting music — not too loud. Make sure to smile when she "sings" to you.

Go out together as often as you can, and tell him about things you see. Make sure he gets to look around.

Help your baby get used to other adults — babysitters, friends, and family members. Let others hold and talk to her, starting with a few minutes at a time.

Keep in mind that caring for an infant takes patience and energy. That means you should take very good care of yourself. Make sure you get all the rest and help you can. All babies cry from time to time, some more than others. Don't blame yourself, and don't blame your baby — you both deserve kind and loving treatment.



FROM SIX TO TWELVE MONTHS

Your baby seems to change completely in her second six months of life. She sits up and turns over. She starts trying to imitate talking. She tries to feed herself. And she starts understanding what you're saying to her.

You can help your baby learn even more by showing her new and different things. Look at a car up close, and point out the tires, the roof, the mirror. Show her the trees, the flowers, the grass. Introduce her to new places — the laundromat, the post office, the shoe store. And talk to her about what you see.

ANYTIME IDEAS

- Let your baby "help" around the house. When you peel apples, give him one to hold and look at. Provide a clean, safe pan and spoon for pretend cooking — or banging.
- Show her how to turn the pages as you read to her. Look for stories with big colorful pictures and sturdy pages. Name the things in the pictures.
- Ask "Do you hear that?" Describe the sounds your baby hears, and talk about what makes them: clock alarms, dog barks, thunderclaps, ambulance sirens.
- Make sure he knows that some kinds of behavior are not OK — like biting, hitting, and throwing things. Say no, explain why, and remove him from the situation. Criticize the behavior, not your baby.
- Your baby will want to put everything in her mouth. Be very careful about what you leave around. But try to limit occasions for saying no. Let her explore as much as possible.

LITTLE EXTRAS

Help him learn how things feel — rough tree bark, soft towels, powdery flour, foamy shaving cream. Go outside to feel snow, rain and mud, flowers, grass and bricks. Describe what each feels like.

Find time to play together. Build a tower for your baby to knock down. Play peekaboo and patty-cake. Make silly faces in the mirror.

Turn on the radio and dance with your baby. It's fun for both of you, and you'll be teaching her about rhythm, music, love, and caring.

Don't be afraid to ask for help in helping your child. It's not a sign of weakness but a sign of strength and wisdom. Join a support group, or attend a parenting class. The more you learn, the more you can help your child learn.

FROM ONE TO TWO YEARS

Think of all your baby is going to learn this year. How to walk and run. How to talk and be understood. Your toddler will make a tremendous leap during these 12 months, and you can help make the most of it.

ANYTIME IDEAS

- Childproof as many rooms as possible. Cover electrical outlets, lock away everything sharp, poisonous, or breakable, and close off all open stairways. You can avoid having to say no all the time if you limit your child's opportunities for troublesome or dangerous behavior and increase the choices of harmless activities.
- Give words to things your toddler picks up and does. "That's your red ball. Listen. It squeaks when you squeeze it."
- Provide lots of praise. Say "good job" and "thank you." Encourage him with hugs and clapping, smiles and words.
- Encourage your toddler to *say* words for things instead of pointing to them. When she points to something, say, "What do you want, the cookie or the cup?" Smile and say, "That's great!" when she tries to answer. Repeat the word as you give the object to her. "Here's your cup."
- Let your baby watch you work, and explain what you're doing. "I'm putting all the cans in the cupboard." "It's cold outside, so I'm putting on my gloves." But make it a conversation, not a lesson.
- Introduce your child to household pets, and teach him to be gentle with animals as well as other children.

LITTLE EXTRAS

Let your toddler see how things work. Show her how to open a door with a key, zip a sturdy zipper, pour water, and use a crayon.

Play direction games. Have your child go *under* the table, *next* to the door, *inside* the bathtub, or *behind* the tree.

Take your toddler to a playground. Talk about how children are going *down* the slide, *back* and *forth* on the swing, *around* and *around* on the merry-go-round.

Make a game out of learning the names of body parts. Have your child wave his hands, open his mouth, close his eyes, or wiggle his toes.

Look for stories with pictures of animals, or plan a visit to a farm or petting zoo. Imitate the sounds the animals make, and listen to your toddler *roar*, *quack*, *moo*, and *oink*.

Don't worry if your child isn't close to being toilet trained yet — patience is very important, and praise is always much more effective than threats or punishment.

FROM

TWO TO THREE

YEARS

Your two-year-old is learning so much, so fast, that he can't possibly do everything right. Try to keep your criticism low and your encouragement high. Learn how to use "time out" for inappropriate behavior. Tell and show him that you're proud of what he's learning.

ANYTIME IDEAS

- Give names to the things she looks at and plays with. "Look how well you're stacking your blocks!" "Come see the fire engine."
- Talk about the colors he sees. "Here's a nice yellow banana." "Do you want to wear your white socks or your red socks?"
- Count aloud. Describe how you're putting on "one, two shoes." Count the stairs as you climb them together.
- Help your child use words, not temper tantrums, to express her feelings. "You're angry because your toy broke, aren't you? Let's try to fix it." Stay calm yourself — that's the best way to help her calm down.
- Make story time as much a part of the day as lunchtime. Get some toddler-level picture books from the library, and include some rip-proof books with his playthings. Invite him to sit on your lap while you read a story or magazine, and comment on the articles or pictures.
- Help her learn about time by talking about the daily schedule — "Grandma is coming over tonight for dinner. But first, it's naptime."

LITTLE EXTRAS

When you are out together, talk about what you see — a dandelion, a sea gull, a branch shaped like a *Y*. Turn a walk into a chance to explore. Point out a tiny ant or a dark rain cloud.

Sit down together, close your eyes, and listen. Take turns describing what you hear. Or hide a softly playing radio or musical toy in the room, and have your child try to find it.

Help him learn about sizes. Gather big and small shoes, bowls, spoons, or boxes. Ask him to give you the small bowl or the big spoon, or to put the small shoe in the big box.

When your child can say her first name, teach her her full name — first, middle, and last. Help her understand that she's a girl, and that some people are girls, while others are boys.

Help him learn how to group similar objects. Cut out magazine pictures, and, together, put all the pictures of food in one stack, cars in another, flowers in another. Ask him which car or flower is his favorite, and why. Point out your favorites too.

Remember, discipline teaches children how to deal with the world. The best way to discipline your child is with consistency and thoughtfulness, never with physical punishment or hurtful words.

FROM THREE TO FOUR YEARS

This is the year of the "why." As tiresome as the endless questions will seem, remember that your child asks "why" because she *needs* to know. Answer her "whys" whenever you can, and look up answers you don't know. If your child talks back, try not to lose your patience and snap at her.

ANYTIME IDEAS

- Help your three-year-old start learning self-help skills, such as brushing his teeth, washing his face and hands, and getting dressed and undressed. Start with the easier skills — taking *off* socks is a lot simpler than putting them on — and praise his efforts.
- Talk to your child the way you'd talk to a friend. Try not to use baby talk, and help her say words correctly: "Try to say *water* instead of *wah-wah*."
- Try to limit TV time to one hour a day. Most children will have seen more than 4,000 hours of TV by the time they start kindergarten. You want him to *do*, not just *watch*. So try not to use the TV as a babysitter.
- Get your preschooler to help around the house. Show her how to put away some of her playthings, throw her dirty clothes in the laundry, set out spoons or napkins for meals, wipe up a spill, and match shoes or socks in pairs.
- Let him see how numbers are part of everyday life. Help him count fruit at the grocery store, stamps for your bills and letters, or pennies for a treat.
- Show that you respect what she has to say by really listening when she talks to you or asks you questions.

LITTLE EXTRAS

Add a twist to story time. Act out familiar stories and verses like "The Three Little Pigs," "Little Red Riding Hood," and "Little Miss Muffet." Use dolls or stuffed animals as characters, and give each a different voice.

Give him props to pretend with: old clothes to play "dress-up" and clean, safe food containers to play "store."

Show her how to use her body in new ways: how to jump, hop, spin, and walk backward.

Make time for your child to play with others. Help him learn about sharing, taking turns, and other ways to cooperate.

Sing songs together, or leave out a word and let her finish: "Twinkle, twinkle, little _____." Try changing the words to songs or rhymes, and see if she can tell you what's wrong: "Little Bo Peep has lost her *cow*."

Encourage his interests. If he likes cars, for example, check out car books from the library, and name the cars and trucks that pass by.

Let her enjoy scribbling and coloring. But be sure she learns to use paper, not walls and tables.

> ***F***ind time just to talk. According to one survey, parents talk to their children, on average, just a few minutes a day — usually giving orders. Talking with your child helps promote learning, and love.

AGES FOUR AND FIVE YEARS

Soon your child will be starting kindergarten. By the first day of school, some children will have learned to ride a bike, others to tie their shoes. Some will be able to sink a basket, others to do a cartwheel. Some will have learned to play a song, others to help bake a cake. But no preschooler can or should be expected to do everything.

Celebrate your child for his own special talents. Don't compare him to others, and try not to push him beyond his level of comfort. Try to say things that build your child's confidence, and avoid saying unkind things that can break his spirit.

ANYTIME IDEAS

- Start up conversations with your child when you're together — at the dinner table, at the grocery store, or in the car. Get her opinion on things like what to cook for dinner or what errand to do first.
- Your child can learn a lot when he's in the car with you. Talk with him about directions, signs, and whatever you happen to see.
- After a read-aloud time or TV program, ask him to tell you about the story — what happened first, next, and last. Ask who his favorite characters were, and why.
- Help her learn to describe things, not just name them. Point out the "fast red convertible," not the "car."
- Visit the library regularly, and let your child pick out the books. When you read together, try to get him to tell you what's happening by looking at the pictures.
- Let her see you read for your own enjoyment — books, magazines, or newspapers.

- Help him learn to recognize his own written name by printing it on his drawings or taping a name tag over his bed.
- Teach her your "real" name. "You call me Mommy, but my real name is _____."
- Let him pick out the clothes he's going to wear each day. Give him choices — "Do you want to wear the blue shirt or the red shirt?" But don't overwhelm him or yourself.
- Teach her your family's phone number and address.

LITTLE EXTRAS

Look for community-sponsored children's activities like puppet shows and children's plays to attend together.

Borrow colorful art books from the library, and explore them with your child.

Try to visit zoos and museums.

Turn on some concert music, or borrow tapes from your library. Try to hear the different instruments — pianos, flutes, drums, trumpets.

Together, practice counting groups of objects to 10. Count how many chairs, pillows, mirrors, or toothbrushes are in your house. Show your child what the numbers look like.

Play school with your child. Take turns as teacher.

If he asks a question you can't answer, look it up in an encyclopedia. Let him study the pictures while you read.

Make books together. Have your child tell you stories. Write them down (in her words), and have her add the pictures.

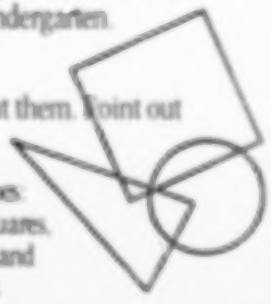
Never leave your child home alone, no matter how briefly, and never have him watch other children. If your child has outside care, make sure you're welcome at any time. Have a clear understanding of the discipline used.

YOUR CHILD FROM

HOME TO SCHOOL

All children are different. They develop at different times and in very different ways. Some children will enter school with more skills than others; all children will work through kindergarten and the early grades to acquire learning skills.

World Book surveyed more than 3,000 kindergarten teachers across the United States and Canada to find out what they thought would help children as they entered school. These educators suggested the skills and behaviors listed below as some of the more important. Watch for and encourage these behaviors and skills as your child gets ready to go to kindergarten.



Size, Shapes, and Colors

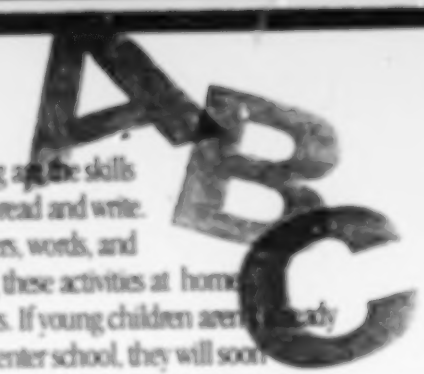
These are part of everyone's home. Talk about them. Point out differences so that children will understand

- basic colors: red, yellow, blue, orange, green, and purple
- big and little
- long and short
- basic shapes: circles, squares, triangles, and rectangles

Position, Direction, Time, and Order

These are things that most of us can't even remember learning. If children aren't aware of the following, they will soon learn to

- understand *up* and *down*, *in* and *out*, *front* and *back*
- understand *over* and *under*, *top* and *bottom*
- understand *fast* and *slow*, *hot* and *cold*
- have a sense of time
- know night from day, and the seasons
- know own age and birthday
- be able to retell simple stories in order (know which house the Big Bad Wolf blows down first)



Reading Readiness

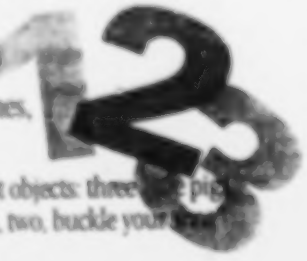
Talking, listening, and observing are the skills that children use to get ready to read and write. Schoolrooms are filled with letters, words, and language activities. Reinforcing these activities at home helps children and their teachers. If young children aren't already doing the following before they enter school, they will soon:

- recognize alphabet letters
- remember objects from a picture
- know some nursery rhymes
- know parts of the body
- follow simple directions
- know common household objects
- identify common zoo and farm animals
- listen politely to adults and other children
- recognize common sounds: bird songs, car horns, trains, and sirens
- talk in sentences
- pronounce own first and last names
- identify own written first name
- identify other children by name
- tell the meaning of simple words
- complete a sentence with the right word
- pretend to read and write (scribbling)
- like having books and have favorite stories
- answer questions about a short story
- tell the meaning of simple words heard in a story
- look at pictures and tell a story

Enjoy this early learning with your children. Be sure they are

- read to frequently
- included in your family discussions
- encouraged to look at books and magazines
- introduced to the library

Numbers and Volume



Numbers and volume interest children. Satisfy their curiosity with nursery rhymes, stories, and music. They will begin to

- count out loud, 1 through 10
- understand *empty* and *full*
- count objects: three little pigs, "one, two, buckle your shoe"

Physical Development

This is an important part of young children's learning. They love to move their bodies and use their hands. This is nature's way for children to develop different muscles. But youngsters

come to school at very different levels of physical development. In kindergarten, children will join in activities that encourage:

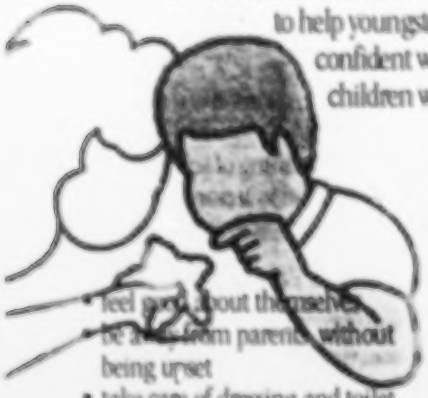
- running, jumping, hopping, skipping, and marching
- throwing a ball
- clapping hands
- building with blocks
- walking up and down stairs

Children will also be using their hands to

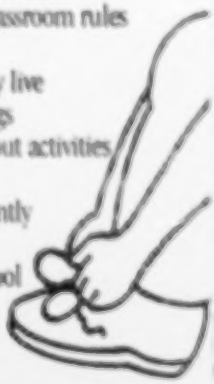
- use crayons, markers, and pencils
- cut simple shapes with scissors
- paste objects
- complete simple puzzles
- fasten buttons and use zippers

Social and Emotional Skills

Social and emotional skills are perhaps the most important behaviors children use and learn in their first classrooms. Building on social skills that children know from home, teachers want to help youngsters feel secure at school and be confident working with others. We hope children who come to school will be able to



- feel good about themselves
- be away from parents without being upset
- take care of dressing and toilet needs
- care for own belongings: coats, sweaters, boots, lunch
- understand basic safety rules
- complete planned activities
- follow simple classroom rules and routines
- know where they live
- share their things
- plan and carry out activities with others
- work independently
- listen carefully
- be happy at school



When children enter the classroom, their world grows. It's natural for them to be a little anxious — and for parents to be anxious too! Youngsters have lots of adjusting to do — to teachers, to principals, and, of course, to other children. But by following the activities in this booklet and cherishing your child, you'll enjoy school together. It's a big beginning for your little one!

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) is a professional nonprofit association dedicated to ensuring that all children receive the best education possible. It serves 26,000 elementary and middle-school principals in the United States, Canada, and overseas.

ORDERING INFORMATION

Little Beginnings: Starting Your Child on a Lifetime of Learning is sold only in bulk (packs of 25): $17.25 per pack ($12.95 for members of the NAESP), plus $2.50 shipping.

A companion booklet aimed at parents of school-age children is available: *The Little Things Make a Big Difference: How to Help Your Children Succeed in School*, from the NAESP and World Book Educational Products. This 17-page brochure is sold only in bulk (packs of 25): $12.50 per pack ($10.00 for members of the NAESP), plus $2.50 shipping.

Also available is a 15-minute companion videotape to *The Little Things Make a Big Difference*. The video speaks directly to parents through family scenes and engaging children's interviews. $19.95 ($14.95 for members of the NAESP), plus $2.50 shipping.

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Dear Parents:

The learning that takes place before your children start school sets the stage for everything they learn in school — and in life. That's why you are your children's first and most important teachers.

We hope this brochure makes your job a bit easier. In it you'll find plenty of easy and common-sense ways to help babies, toddlers, and preschoolers develop a love of learning that lasts a lifetime.

Please share this brochure with family members and anyone else who cares for your children, remembering that, more than any single skill, your little ones need to know how much they are loved and respected.

Our nation's first educational goal is that all children will start school ready to learn. With your help, we'll succeed.

Samuel Sava, Ph.D.
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